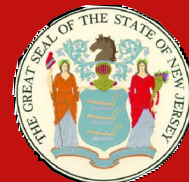




THE NEW JERSEY ADVOCATE



Quarterly Publication

A Publication of the Division of the Ratepayer Advocate

Fall 2005

Message from the Director

Fall Into Conservation: Save Money and Natural Resources



Seema M. Singh
Ratepayer Advocate

As fall alerts us to the coming of winter and children return to school, we make changes in our homes and businesses. We bring in our plants, put away the summer clothing and store the outdoor furniture. This year we are urging consumers to learn

how to conserve energy and water as they begin their preparations for the cold months ahead. Throughout this past summer, we read expert predictions that the costs of heating oil and natural gas would sharply increase. We also learned about the need to improve the quality and availability of drinking water and the protection of all New Jersey's water sources as a way to preserve fish and wild life.

Even before the devastating hurricanes which caused so much damage to the oil and natural gas infrastructure in the Gulf, we anticipated sharply rising heating costs. Since the hurricanes, it is predicted that the cost of heating homes and businesses in New Jersey this winter will rise even more sharply. The national prediction for the cost of natural gas, which heats many New Jersey homes, is an increase of 176 percent. The national increase of the per gallon cost of heating oil is estimated at 87 percent as of September.

In response to these predictions, the Ratepayer Advocate
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Message from the Acting Governor

Guarding Open Space to Protect the Highlands and NJ's Water Resources



Richard J. Codey
Acting Governor

The Ratepayer Advocate's October conference this year includes water resources as one of its major topics of discussion. This is a clear reminder to us of how vital this resource is to our state and to our very existence.

Throughout this year, I have taken actions to strengthen New Jersey's water resources on several fronts. One essential effort has been to protect our state's remaining open spaces, which have been dwindling. As open space is reduced, it can cause a domino effect of drying up our water resources.

The protection of water bodies and open spaces was the purpose of the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act, which celebrated its one year anniversary in August. The New Jersey Highlands is a beautiful 1,250-square-mile area in the northwest part of the State, stretching from Phillipsburg in the southwest to Ringwood in the northeast. It lies within portions of seven counties and 87 municipalities. Sixty-four percent of New Jersey residents, about 5.4 million people, receive their water from the Highlands. In addition, the forests and wetlands of the Highlands are important habitats for many species of reptiles, amphibians, mammals and resident and migrating birds.

Earlier this year, I signed an \$8 million agreement to
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Fall Into Conservation

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RATEPAYER ADVOCATE LAUNCHES CONSERVATION FOR KIDS PROGRAM

IT'S COOL TO CONSERVE

On September 30, Ratepayer Advocate Seema Singh launched the first in a series of educational presentations on Conservation for Kids, for school children in grades K-8 at the Mountain View Elementary School in Flanders.

In these times of rising energy and water prices, teaching simple lessons like turning off the lights when you leave the room and turning off the water while brushing your teeth will make both students and teachers more aware of their energy and water usage and how they can best preserve these resources.

The presentation includes an interactive presentation on conservation, a question-and-answer session, and the distribution of educational materials and giveaways for the students. The program runs approximately one hour.

The Ratepayer Advocate firmly believes conservation is the key to reducing utility bills, increasing the reliability of service, and protecting the environment for years to come. It is particularly important to begin educating our youth at an early age. Contact us today to schedule a presentation for children in your school or library by calling (973) 648-2690 or by sending an e-mail to njratepayer@rpa.state.nj.us.



At left, Ratepayer Advocate Seema M. Singh and students hold up water bottles embossed with the Ratepayer Advocate logo and the slogan, It's Cool To Conserve.

At right, students of Mountain View Elementary School, seen with Singh and Gail Reuther, Executive Director of the Mount Olive Child Care and Learning Center, which hosted the kick-off event of the Conservation for Kids statewide initiative of the Ratepayer Advocate.



September 30 Mountain View Elementary School, Flanders

October 13 Woodbury Child Development Center

October 14 Roosevelt Elementary School, South Plainfield

October 19 Ratepayer Advocate's Office, Newark

October 25 Monmouth Beach Elementary School

November 2 Family Friendly Center, Newark



Students of Mountain View Elementary School are joined by Singh and her staff and the staff of the Mount Olive Child Care and Learning Center, which hosted the kick-off event on Sept. 30.

November 4 Belmar Elementary School

November 14 Louis Spencer School, Newark

November 18 Oakcrest Academy, Somerset

November 21 Lakewood Oak Street School

November 28 Southard School, Howell

November 30 Southwood School, Old Bridge

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Praise for the Conservation for Kids Program

On behalf of the DHS School Based Youth Services Program, I would like to congratulate you on the successful launch of the Conservation for Kids initiative...

I was delighted...The graphics were wonderful and the combination of lesson and quiz was delivered in just the right tone to make the topic relatable for youngsters. Rather than preaching at them, you make them aware of the many benefits of conservation and invite them to take an active role in preserving our natural resources.

The youngsters...loved being your first "All Star" conservation team and took very seriously what they learned about the conservation measures they can take in their daily lives...that will enrich their lives, promote social responsibility, build on their self esteem and create a sense of empowerment. And, at the same time, they had fun...it's exciting to think about the conservation momentum you are generating among New Jersey's youngsters.

Loretta Wish, Family Friendly Center Statewide Manager
Office of Children's Services
Division of Prevention and Community Partnerships

RATEPAYER ADVOCATE IN THE NEWS

Energy Bills Seen Chilling Consumers

[Illinois electric company] ComEd, which has no generating capacity and wants to buy electricity via an auction from power generators beginning in 2007, says higher bills will result...

New Jersey is the only state to adopt the auction method of procurement and its results are reassuring.

"I think the auction has worked well for New Jersey residential customers," said Seema Singh, Ratepayer Advocate of New Jersey. She said that in the 2003 auction, rates went up 1.5 percent. Last year they rose 2.4 percent.

Chicago Tribune
September 18, 2005

NJ Girds for Sharply Higher Heating Costs

The national per gallon cost for heating oil has increased about 87 percent, and natural gas rose 176 percent since last September, according to the state Division of the Ratepayer Advocate. Some 594,000 homes use heating oil in New Jersey, and 2 million use natural gas.

"We're urging consumers to get ready," said Ratepayer Advocate Seema Singh. "Unfortunately, we are all in for a tough winter," said Singh, who attributed the prices to a competitive global market, natural disasters and lack of domestic supply.

Associated Press
October 12, 2005



Ratepayer Advocate Seema M. Singh joined Congressman Rush Holt and other state and non-profit organization officials at a press conference on October 5 calling for emergency funds for the federal Low Income Assistance Program (LIHEAP) which helps low-income families across the country pay their energy bills.

Pupils Learn to Save Water, Energy

A group of enthusiastic elementary school students raised their right hands and (not so) solemnly swore to save water and energy during an after-school visit last Friday [September 30] by Seema Singh, the state Ratepayer Advocate.

Singh said she launched the campaign after seeing her 12-year-old daughter leave the television on one too many times. She said she hoped the message would resonate with children and their parents, especially with rising energy costs.

"We want to instill it in the kids at an early age -- especially with prices rising," Singh said. "We need to tell them, 'Conserve our natural resources. Don't take anything for granted.'"

The Star Ledger
October 3, 2005

RATEPAYER ADVOCATE ON THE ROAD

October 21, 2005 - Ms. Singh gave a presentation on energy conservation to a group of seniors at the Senior Center in Flemington.

October 26, 2005 - Ms. Singh gave a presentation on energy conservation to South Brunswick Seniors at the South Brunswick Senior Citizen Center.

October 28, 2005 - The Ratepayer Advocate hosts a conference on *New Jersey's Future: Emerging Issues in Telecommunications and Water* at the Holiday Inn in Monroe Township.

November 2, 2005 - The Ratepayer Advocate will give a Conservation for Kids presentation to the students at the Family Friendly Center in Newark.

November 15, 2005 - Ms. Singh will give presentations on energy conservation and "How to Reduce Your Utility Bill" at the Berkeley Heights Senior Citizens Center.

December 9, 2005 - The Ratepayer Advocate will give presentations to the Latino community on energy conservation and financial assistance programs at PROCEED Incorporated in Elizabeth.

Ratepayer Advocate Reaches Out to the Latino Community at Family Health Festival

On **September 25** the Division Of The Ratepayer Advocate distributed consumer education information on conservation of energy in Spanish at a family health festival, hosted by Save Latin America Inc. (SLA), at the Jose Marti Middle School in Union City. Nearly 2000 people from the Latino communities attended the event.

FALL FOR CONSERVATION

Stay Energy Wise This Fall

With summer winding down and peak usage behind us, it is important to continue the ethic of energy conservation throughout the fall and winter. As the days grow shorter and darker we turn the lights on earlier and leave them on longer. As cooler weather approaches, it is important for us to take advantage of every energy-saving opportunity. Take these steps now to reduce energy usage this fall:

Lighting - Turn the lights off whenever not needed.

Water Heater - Insulate your water heater and lower the water temperature to 120 degrees.

Furnace - Change your furnace filter to ensure it runs efficiently.

Thermostat - Install a programmable thermostat to adjust the temperature in your home while you're asleep or out of the house.

Furniture - Keep furniture and curtains away from heating vents or radiators to allow the heat to circulate freely throughout the room.

Let The Sun Shine In - Open curtains and blinds to let the sun naturally warm your home and you'll enjoy watching the beautiful fall leaves as they change colors.

Having an efficient home and practicing conservation are simple ways to reduce energy usage and make heating bills more manageable throughout the fall and winter months. For more energy conservation tips, as well as water conservation tips, download a free copy of the Ratepayer Advocate's Consumer Conservation Handbook, now in its 2nd edition, at www.rpa.state.nj.us.



Message from the Director

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has joined state and federal legislators and not-for-profit groups urging Congress to increase emergency funding for the Low Income Home Energy Program (LIHEAP). In New Jersey in the winter of 2004, 156,000 eligible families received LIHEAP assistance. Many others, not eligible for this federal funding, sought assistance from state and local governments and not-for-profit groups which grant emergency heating assistance. During this winter the need will be even greater, making energy conservation an even higher priority for everyone in New Jersey.

Throughout this year I spoke in communities all over the state about the importance of conservation to help lower energy and water costs. To enable the people of New Jersey to adopt conservation techniques in their homes and businesses most economically and efficiently, my staff and I have prepared conservation materials for distribution including our *Consumer Conservation Handbook* which we give out at our consumer education presentations and offer at no cost to the public.

We urge and encourage you to be sure that conservation procedures are part of your regular winterizing routines this fall. They can help reduce your utility bills and protect our precious natural resources.

In late September, since it is never too early to teach the importance of conserving energy and water, we launched a Conservation for Kids program presented to school children in grades K-8. We urge everyone to set their children good examples by beginning your winterizing conservation routines and sharing the following conservation tips with everyone in your family as you get ready for the cold months ahead: use energy-efficient heating appliances; winterize your home now: check and repair storm windows and review insulation; have your furnace serviced; try negotiating fuel delivery contracts for the entire season; and stop heat loss in your home by caulking and weather-stripping cracks in walls, doors, windows or other openings in your home. Encourage your children to participate in energy conservation efforts.

Contact the Ratepayer Advocate for our free *Consumer Conservation Handbook*, which is filled with energy-saving tips or arrange a Ratepayer Advocate consumer education presentation for your civic, community or religious groups by calling (973)648-2690 or visit us on the web at www.rpa.state.nj.us.



One of the younger students in the audience of the Conservation for Kids presentation by Ratepayer Advocate Seema M. Singh at the Mountain View Elementary School in Flanders seals her pledge to conserve with a hug.

Seema Singh
Seema M. Singh
Ratepayer Advocate

CONSUMER ADVICE

Financial Assistance Programs: Energy Assistance for People in Need

The Ratepayer Advocate ensures that utilities provide services at the most reasonable rates possible and makes sure information is available about programs to assist ratepayers experiencing difficulty paying utility bills. There are several financial assistance options for energy consumers. By calling the toll-free numbers below or accessing the Internet, you can obtain eligibility requirements, enrollment forms and registration/filing deadlines for each program.



Ratepayer Advocate Seema M. Singh received many questions from the audience during her consumer education presentation, "Understanding Your Utility Bill" and "Conserve Energy and Save Money" at the Hunterdon County Division of Senior Services in Flemington on August 19.

NJ SHARES
1-866-657-4273
www.njshares.org

NJ SHARES provides assistance through a statewide, year-round independent energy fund. NJ SHARES provides a one-time grant for those who are experiencing a major financial setback, such as a job loss or medical crisis. There is no low income requirement. Potential recipients are asked to demonstrate that they have exhausted all other sources of assistance and that they have made a good faith effort to pay their energy bills.

Universal Service Fund (USF)
1-866-240-1347

www.energyassistance.nj.gov

USF is a program created by the State of New Jersey that make energy bills more affordable for low-income customers. USF accepts applications all year.

Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)
1-800-510-3102

www.energyassistance.nj.gov

LIHEAP is a federally funded program that provides subsidies to help low-income families (including renters) pay home heating costs and medically necessary cooling costs.

Winter Moratorium Program
1-800-624-0241

www.bpu.state.nj.us/home/energyAssistance.shtml

The New Jersey Board of Public Utilities (BPU) Winter Moratorium Program prevents a regulated electric or gas utility from discontinuing service during the heating season (November 15 through March 15). Please check with the BPU to see if you qualify.

Weatherization Assistance Program
1-800-510-3102

www.eere.energy.gov/weatherization

Homes of eligible applicants will undergo an energy audit and may receive weatherization services including insulation, caulking and weatherstripping. Some eligible homes may even have heating systems, doors and windows repaired or replaced.

NJ Lifeline
1-800-792-9745

www.state.nj.us/health/seniorbenefits

Lifeline is a state funded program that provides a credit toward gas and electric bills for disabled or senior homeowners and renters.



Litigation Manager Paul E. Flanagan discusses consumer concerns following a presentation at the West Windsor Senior Center in West Windsor on September 12.

What Else Can You Do If You Are Having Trouble Paying Energy Bills?

Things happen that are beyond an individual's control. If you have trouble paying your energy bills, take action quickly – don't wait.

The first thing to do is call the utility and try to work out a payment plan. Customers should not be embarrassed to take the initiative. Don't wait for the company to call for collection or past due bills. Utility customer service representatives are trained to provide options and assistance regarding payment arrangements.

Budget Billing

Budget billing (also known as an equal payment plan) allows you to pay a fixed amount each month so that during the times you use less energy, you are pre-paying for times when you use more energy. You may need to be current on your utility bill in order for this to be implemented. Check with your utility company for more details.

ON THE RATEPAYER ADVOCATE RADAR

Benefits and Protections Sought for Consumers in the Verizon/MCI Merger

At a public hearing held in Somerset on September 13, Ratepayer Advocate Seema M. Singh set forth conditions recommended to be imposed by the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities to ensure that the merger between Verizon and MCI will have positive benefits for consumers.

Some of the conditions the Ratepayer Advocate recommended to protect ratepayers and to maintain reliable, affordable and secure telecommunications services for the people of New Jersey include:

- the flow through of merger benefits to customers either through rate reductions or a rate freeze;
- a commitment from Verizon to offer broadband access at basic local exchange service rates;
- revision and strengthening of existing service quality standards and financial sanctions if service quality standards are not met; and
- a commitment from Verizon to retain at least the same level and mix of employees as existed as of July 2005 for three years after the merger.

Ratepayer Advocate Monitors PSE&G "myPower" Pilot Program

PSE&G recently received approval from the Board of Public Utilities to implement a pilot program called "myPower" to study the benefits of advanced metering and load control equipment, and to test residential customers' response to electric pricing that varies depending on when the electricity is used. PSE&G believes the pilot program will help them learn what customers need to make informed decisions about how to control energy usage and costs, and whether customers can reduce their energy bills while maintaining comfort.

An initial phase of the program, involving the on-off cycling of central air conditioners for residential and small commercial participants during periods of peak energy usage, was implemented at the beginning of summer 2005. The second phase, expected to begin some time in 2006, will test residential customers' ability to change their usage of electricity in response to changing prices. Participating customers will receive advanced electric meters that record when electricity was used, and other equipment such as programmable thermostats to help control usage of electricity.

The Ratepayer Advocate is actively monitoring the pilot program to ensure that it proceeds in a cost efficient manner and benefits those participating customers and ultimately, if deployed state-wide, the residents of New Jersey.

Ratepayer Advocate Seema M. Singh Speaks on Importance of Public Service to High School Student Leaders

Ratepayer Advocate Seema M. Singh spoke on the importance of public service before high school student leaders at the Junior Statesmen Foundation's 2005 Symposium on New Jersey Politics and Government at the Statehouse in Trenton on August 17.

More than 100 high school student leaders from throughout the state were selected to spend a week in mid-August participating in a comprehensive assessment of New Jersey state politics and government.

At the Statehouse symposium, Singh joined state Senators and Assembly members, other Cabinet officials, political science professors, law enforcement leaders, and senior state and federal government staff members in discussing the governmental landscape of New Jersey.

Singh encouraged the students to participate in public service. "Begin to prepare yourselves now for your involvement in public service-whether you become an elected official, a public servant, or as an informed voter. Our world needs you to become and remain informed and enlightened citizens."

"Our world needs you to become and remain informed and enlightened citizens."



Ratepayer Advocate Seema M. Singh addresses the 2005 Symposium on New Jersey Politics and Government, sponsored by the Junior Statesmen Foundation of Washington D.C. on "The Role of Young Leaders in Politics and Government," at the State House.

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN TRENTON

Legislature Investigates Ways to Address Gasoline Pricing

The Legislature is studying ways to best address the high costs of gasoline in New Jersey. Several Senators and Assembly members have proposed a range of legislative initiatives-including implementing a profit cap for gas wholesalers, enforcing strict cost control measures, imposing criminal penalties for price gouging during states of emergency, and offering a state subsidy for the leasing of electric vehicles.

The Assembly Transportation Committee held two hearings on gas pricing in September. Testimony centered on fact-finding information, such as how crude oil is refined, brought to market as gasoline and priced, as well as possible remedies to benefit consumers. In addition to



the proposed legislative measures, some recommendations made to the Legislature for immediate relief included requiring the state to use high-efficiency vehicles and urging motorists to carpool or use mass transit.

Acting Governor Richard J. Codey announced on Sept. 26 that New Jersey filed lawsuits against oil companies and independent gas-station operators for price violations during the Hurricane Katrina crisis.

Ratepayer Advocate Seema M. Singh applauded the Governor and Legislature for working to tackle the gasoline pricing situation in New Jersey and has offered assistance in helping to address the problem.

Message from the Acting Governor

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preserve Camp Todd - one of the largest remaining open spaces in Bergen County and a significant water resource in the state's Highlands region. This 75-acre, former Boy Scout camp will be preserved through a partnership among the

Department of Environmental Protection, Bergen County and Fyke Nature Association.

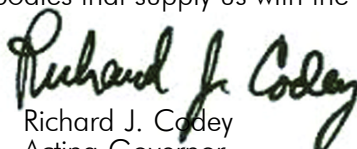
Camp Todd helps augment New Jersey's existing preservation projects in the Highlands. The purchase of the property brings the total amount of preserved open space in the region to more than 200,000 acres. In addition, seven water bodies in the region have been designated as deserving the strictest protection.

This area certainly deserves to be preserved in its pristine and untouched condition and this new partnership will ensure that this space will never be developed so that New Jersey can maintain the natural landscapes and unique communities that make our state so appealing. The Camp Todd tract features significant water resources and habitat. The tract is located in the Ramapo River watershed and contains two tributary streams to the Ramapo River, one of which is protected as a Category One waterway for its trout production. The tract contains exceptional wetlands, two vernal ponds

and Todd Lake. The property supports threatened and endangered species including the barred owl, bobcat and red-shouldered hawk.

The property expands existing preserved open space in the Ramapo Mountains, which includes the 4,200-acre Ramapo Mountain State Forest, contiguous to Bergen County's 2,145-acre Ramapo Reservation, 750-acre Camp Glen Gray, and 181-acre Camp Tamarack.

I encourage you to take some time this fall to enjoy our state's open spaces like the Highlands region and Camp Todd. As you enjoy the scenery, I ask that you also remember how precious our land is, and how essential it is to protect our natural resources and the magnificent water bodies that supply us with the water so vital to our lives as well as the preservation of our wildlife and fertile grounds.


Richard J. Codey
Acting Governor
State of New Jersey



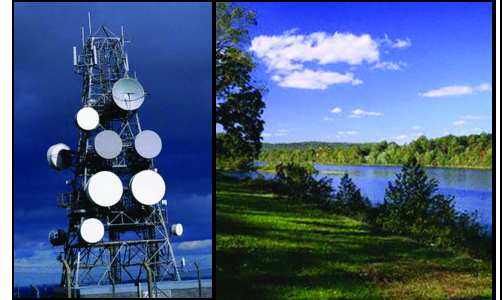
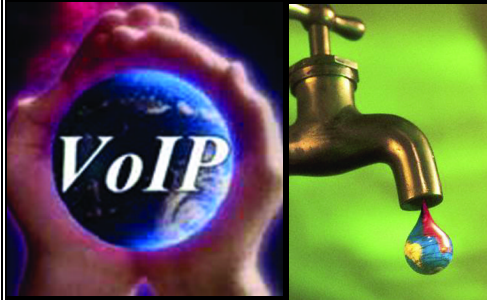
On October 6 Acting Governor Richard J. Codey launched a Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training program at United Water, a move that will bolster New Jersey's leadership role in disaster preparedness.



In spring of this year, Acting Governor Richard J. Codey announced an \$8 million agreement to preserve Camp Todd, one of the largest remaining open spaces in Bergen County and a significant water resource in the state's Highlands region. The 75-acre former Boy Scout camp will be protected from any type of development.

**Ratepayer Advocate Seema M. Singh, Esq. and the Staff of the
New Jersey Division of the Ratepayer Advocate Present their
Annual Conference 2005 on**

New Jersey's Future: Emerging Challenges in Telecommunications and Water



**Friday, October 28, 2005
Holiday Inn, Monroe Township, NJ
EXIT 8A off the NJ TURNPIKE
9:30 A.M. – 3:30 P.M.**

**Registration required. Call us or visit our website for details.
(973) 648-2690 www.rpa.state.nj.us**

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